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010804Z Aug 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L TAIPEI 003193

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SUBJECT: REDISTRICTING: SOMEBODY HAS TO DO TO IT

REF: TAIPEI 2839

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (U) Summary: The constitutional reform package passed by the National Assembly on June 7 requires Taiwan's Legislative Yuan (LY) electoral districts to be redrawn. The Central Election Commission (CEC) is presently managing the task, which by law must be completed one year before the December 2007 LY election. As part of its "bottom-up" redistricting strategy, a CEC subcommittee has begun drafting "general redistricting guidelines," which will be distributed to local election commissions that will then draft the initial redistricting plans for CEC review. CEC members expect the LY to try to take over the redistricting project when it convenes in September, and fear political divisions within the LY will further complicate the time-consuming redistricting process. End summary.

¶2. (U) On June 19, the CEC established a seven-member subcommittee to oversee redistricting procedures. The DPP, KMT, PFP, and TSU each have one representative on the subcommittee, which also includes three independent members. Hwang Jau-yuan, a self-described "light green" (i.e. moderate DPP) non-party member, told AIT that the subcommittee decided last week to follow a "bottom-up" approach, enlisting local election commissions to draft preliminary redistricting plans according to "general redistricting guidelines" formulated in advance by the CEC. The CEC would then use local plans to prepare the final redistricting plan. By delegating preliminary drafting power to local authorities, Huang explained, the presidentially-appointed CEC hopes to avoid accusations of pro-DPP bias.

¶3. (U) Hwang and KMT subcommittee representative Liu Kwan-hua separately told AIT that the redistricting process is under considerable time pressure because the new districts must be in place one year before the December 2007 LY election. Hwang said he expects the subcommittee to finalize and publish its "general redistricting guidelines" in August or September, and then set a tentative target date of March 2006 for local election commissions to submit their draft redistricting plans. Hwang noted that most election commissions would wait until after the December 3 city/county chief elections to deal with redistricting, since local leaders and local election commissions could change. Holding to the CEC March deadline would give the local commissions only three months to draft their plans.

¶4. (C) Hwang and Liu confided to AIT that, since the redistricting process will undoubtedly be difficult and politically charged, they and other members of the CEC secretly hope the LY will assume the responsibility.

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However, since time is short, and the LY may not make a decision for some time, the CEC and its subcommittee are working under the assumption that the task could remain theirs. Hwang said DPP legislators will likely object to any redistricting proposal tendered by the Pan-Blue-controlled LY, forcing any bill into "cold storage" for four months, as required by LY procedural regulations. This would mean the LY might not act on redistricting until January or February 2006 at the earliest.

¶5. (C) Comment: Many opposition LY members see the presidentially-appointed CEC as nothing more than a political tool of the president. For this reason, the Pan-Blue-controlled LY may move to strip redistricting authority from the CEC and confer it on an ad hoc LY committee. The number of pressing issues awaiting LY consideration in September, however, including the Defense Procurement Special Budget, could divert LY attention and give the CEC time to move forward on its redistricting effort. End comment.

(Prepared by POL Intern Angela S. Wu.)

PAAL